

Slaughter Hosts Congressional Briefing, NFL Linebacker Will Witherspoon Testifies

WASHINGTON – Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (NY-28), the only microbiologist in Congress, today hosted a Congressional briefing on the overuse of antibiotics in animals. Slaughter welcomed panelists Will Witherspoon, a linebacker for the NFL's Tennessee Titans and owner of Shire Gate Farm, as well as Frank Reese of Good Shepherd Poultry Ranch cooperative and veterinarian and medical expert Dr. Michael Blackwell, DVM, MPH.

At Shire Gate Farm, Witherspoon applies high-welfare, sustainable farming techniques that almost entirely rule out the need for antibiotics. By following these techniques, Witherspoon doesn't need to rely on routine antibiotic use to keep animals healthy or prevent disease.

At the briefing, Slaughter emphasized the need to reduce our antibiotic use in animals and address the growing public health threat of superbugs. "Just last year, the United States had three major outbreaks of antibiotic-resistant foodborne illness, all from meat products," said Slaughter. "Decades of research has shown that daily dosing of antibiotics to healthy livestock is largely to blame for the rise in resistant bacteria. Routine use of antibiotics in feed is unnecessary for raising food-animals, and I'm dedicated to addressing this problem and protecting public health."

Slaughter is the author of the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act, which is designed to end the routine use of antibiotics on healthy animals and curb the growing threat of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Antibiotic-resistant disease now kills more Americans each year than HIV/AIDS.

Frank Reese, a Kansas poultry farmer and member of the Good Shepherd Poultry Ranch cooperative, raises heritage chickens and turkeys on pasture, and does not administer subtherapeutic antibiotics. His farm is a living example that healthy animals do not need to be fed antibiotics in order to operate a successful farm.

Dr. Blackwell has a productive and successful career that includes service as dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Tennessee; as deputy director for the FDA's

Center for Veterinary Medicine; as vice chair of the Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production; and chief of staff of the Office of the Surgeon General of the United States. At the briefing, Dr. Blackwell pointed out that antibiotic-resistant infections cost the United States an estimated \$4 billion annually.

An estimated 80% of all antimicrobials sold in the United States today are being used to counteract the consequences of farm animals being confined in overcrowded, stressful and unsanitary conditions, and to speed their growth. A direct link has been demonstrated between this use and the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria "superbugs" that affect the health of both animals and people.